

**FINAL  
10/26/05  
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN TEXT FOR CITY CENTER-LAND USE CHAPTER**

***AREA 5 – City Center/Downtown***

The City Center encompasses an eight-block and approximately 22 acre area centered on Broad Street and Maple Avenue and extends west to Little Falls Street, east to North Washington Street, north to Park Avenue and south Gibson Street. See Figure 4-6 for a map of this area. The “Mixed-Use” future land use designation has been applied to the entire City Center area with the exception of the pocket park at the intersection of West Annandale and South Washington Streets, to encourage an integrated mixture of commercial and residential uses.

The City Center area is a subset of the larger commercial district centered around the intersection of Washington and Broad Streets and is the area in which much of the City’s business and public activities are and historically have been concentrated. Facilities in this area include the Post Office, The Falls Church, and numerous retail and office uses. The majority of this area is classified in the B-2 Central Business Zoning District. The entire City Center area has historically had a land use designation of “Business” on the Future Land Use Plan Map. Because a downtown business district is the pivotal focus for every city, a mixture of uses that reinforces the image of a traditional downtown is appropriate for this sector, along with the “Mixed-Use” future land use designation described in Change 5 within Figure 4-5.

The Post Office is located at the western edge of this area. It is a one-story brick structure that was constructed in 1953, and is too small to serve the current postal needs of the City. This building and a number of one and two-story buildings in this vicinity, which were also constructed during the 1950s and 1960s, should be redeveloped in a consolidated manner whenever possible to create slightly larger and taller structures with the capability of adding structured, first floor, or underground parking facilities. The adjacent strip center and Post Office should be incorporated in the redevelopment of the City Center if possible. In addition, the Bowl America and Virginia Village sites should also be redeveloped at some point in the future, as complimentary peripherals to the City Center development and any redevelopment of Virginia Village should address the replacement of the pre-existing affordable dwelling units at this site. The property located adjacent to Virginia Village at 400 South Maple Avenue is planned for a mixture of office, retail, and residential condominiums with an anticipated completion date of 2007.

Over the past four decades many concepts for the center of the City have been discussed. In 1965 “A Plan for the Central Business District” laid the groundwork for the existing zoning, land use and transportation circulation patterns in the area surrounded by Broad and Washington Streets. In 1971 “Proposed Development Plan- Crossroads Area” was developed by an Urban Design Assistance Team made much more dramatic recommendations for changing traffic and land use patterns in this section of the City.

The report recommended elevating a large plaza area and fairly dense development above Broad Street with cars traveling through at grade vias.

By 1988 the “Central Business Special Strategy Area Report, Phase I” described the redevelopment potential for many parcels in the downtown/City Center area based on the zoning and Master Plan that existed at the time. The report also began to define possible changes in the urban form that would bring buildings closer to the street and closer together and laid out possible zoning changes to accomplish these recommendations.

In 1999 the State Theatre completed its renovation, and it, along with other successful downtown restaurants, has brought increased nighttime pedestrian traffic and demand for other nighttime restaurants and other activities. Several office structures have also been built or renovated at the intersection of Broad and Washington Streets during the past few decades, including George Mason Square, Independence Square, and the Robertson Building. These brick structures range in height from three to six stories. Several very small-scale, one- and two-story structures represent an underutilization of existing land use and zoning allowances for this district. New development should take advantage of existing height and lot coverage provisions and possible density bonuses offered through other zoning provisions.

While none of these plans for the City Center Area has been fully realized, some development has occurred in this area. In addition, five new urban mixed-use development projects have been approved in the Broad and Maple Street corridors. These projects reflect new market demand for mixed-use products.

There are several factors associated with the redevelopment of the Downtown and City Center area of the City. The primary factor is the need to consolidate a variety of relatively small, irregularly shaped parcels. Another factor is land for parking spaces. Even though some parcels can currently be developed with seven-story structures, most of them are too small to accommodate the minimum parking requirements. Future redevelopment that occurs at higher intensities will require alternatives to surface parking, such as structured or underground garages. Another factor in the development of the City Center area is the preservation of three historic structures within the planned redevelopment area. These structures should either be moved to another location or incorporated into the City Center project as civic or private facilities.

The City has a vested interest in the development of a thriving City Center to provide locally the needed goods and services for its residents and businesses; to provide necessary public open space and an efficient transportation and parking system within the area; and to encourage development that will create a means of generating long-term sustainable revenue. As a landowner within the City Center area, the City also has the responsibility to maximize the benefits to its residents of the sale of or joint partnerships involving this land and to consider the acquisition of private lands necessary to create public open spaces, roads, and parking facilities that will all meet essential public purposes for the development of City Center.

In 2000 the City commissioned a study to create a vision for a new City Center or a relatively dense, yet human-scaled, lively mixed-use district that would serve as a destination for city residents and non-residents and contain many day and nighttime activities. This plan was created by the Street-works Inc. consulting firm through an in depth study and public review process in 2001. The plan received popular support at a series of public meetings as well as the support of the Urban Land Institute (ULI) through its Smart Growth Alliance awards in 2002. The Smart Growth Alliance jury noted that the City Center “proposal contains key elements of smart growth, including a focus on: intertwining quality public space with private development, improving walkability, and providing a sense of community”.

In March 2002 the City Council appointed the City Center Task Force to conduct an independent fact based analysis of the final report and to make recommendations to the City Council on how to proceed in the development of a City Center. In Fall 2002, the City Center Task Force oversaw a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) seeking a master developer to initiate the project. The City Center Task Force then issued a more specific Request for Proposal (RFP) to identify and recommend to the City Council a private development partner to be known as the “City Center Master Developer”. The City staff team and developer conducted negotiations over several months in early 2004, but did not reach agreement on a development program. In November 2004, the City Council, upon recommendation of the City Center Task Force, terminated the Master Developer negotiations. At this time it also became evident that market conditions had changed to the extent that the City no longer required a master developer to create a City Center.

The vision for City Center has evolved throughout these processes and is articulated below in the following Vision Statement. City Center is also described by the following set of guiding principles, land use and design principles, and concept plan elements, which will aid in the implementation of the vision.

#### Vision:

The vision for the City Center depicts a vibrant hub of community activity. The City Center area is highly accessible to pedestrians, bikers, transit, and automotive modes of travel. The City Center is a place where people will come to stroll, shop, dine, work, attend cultural and entertainment events such as the Farmers’ Market or City festivals, buy food and drink, conduct civic business, and live. The City Center should be designed to provide many of the goods and services that City residents need on a daily basis to reduce the number of resident trips outside the City and it should be a magnet to business from the surrounding region.

To those ends, then, the City Center will be the primary commercial hub of activity for the City represented by office uses, hotels, national, regional, and local retailers, grocery and restaurant opportunities and cultural, civic, and entertainment venues supported by a secondary residential component. Public and private open space and green space, with continuous sidewalks, bicycle paths and street trees will balance the hardscape elements to create an environmentally healthy and aesthetically pleasing Great Place.

### City Center Guiding Principles:

- ***Great Place.*** The primary great place, the town common or primary public space, is the anchor of the City Center and is located on the north side of Broad Street at Maple Avenue. It includes a few passive amenities and is flanked on each side by street-level retail including cafes and restaurants, and a theater, with office and residential uses above the first floor. The common is linked to off-street parking, other City Center blocks, and to the City's residential neighborhoods through a series of sidewalks and pedestrian walkways. Linkages should acknowledge the connections to the City Hall complex, the library, the Falls Church, and State Theater, as well as the adjoining neighborhoods and Big Chimneys Park. The town common will be a center of everyday civic, social and recreational activity for residents of the City Center, City, and region, in addition to the patrons, visitors and customers of the commercial and entertainment venues. This area will likely include public art or water features, performing arts space and/or visitors center.
- ***Mixed Use.*** The development program for the four-block area shall be a balanced mixture of uses. The uses may be mixed within blocks and/or within buildings. The types and mixes should reinforce and maximize the current market conditions, while at the same time follow location and layout criteria that ensures their best chance to be successful. The City Center plan shall embrace mixed-use and pedestrian friendly design concepts to bring a vibrant, balanced and sustainable diversity of activities and land uses to the project area. The mix will include commercial office, retail, restaurants, cafes, theaters, art galleries, a hotel, recreational facilities, rental and owner-occupied housing, structured garage, street and surface parking, a town common, along with pedestrian walkways, sidewalks and alleyways, incorporating streetscape enhancements. The development program should further reinforce the principles of City Center and be financially, socially, and environmentally sustainable over the near and long term. Each building should contain a predominant use, and every attempt must be made to have retail and restaurants on at least the first floor of buildings around the perimeter of the town common and along the frontages of West Broad Street and Maple Avenue. Stand-alone destination retail may anchor the major corners of the project area (along Broad Street). Commercial space is a high priority, and short-term residential opportunities shall not be substituted. Residential uses should reflect market based product types for the upper floors, and should include housing products currently not available in this market such as live work units and loft condominiums.

City Center should be developed with the goal of providing a significant commercial activity center supplemented by residential uses as guided by the market and dictated by the City's fiscal analysis. This area is planned to become the City's commercial center and residential uses should be included only at the level necessary to ensure maximum commercial activity in the City Center.

- ***Unique Design.*** The creation of a significant public gathering place is only complete with adjacent private uses that create the “walls of space,” define the scale and character of the place, and activate the place with the people who live, work and shop there. To that end, the City has an expectation that the City Center design will be exemplary and unique, from the largest details such as building design and the integration of open space, to the relationship between the buildings, to the design of entryways from the parking areas, as well as the details of landscaping and signage and the inclusion of public art. The City’s Design Guidelines shall be implemented in the City Center area to create a unique and cohesive look that could be more urban than other sections of the City with somewhat taller buildings and greater density. It should include a unified streetscape feature and an established building wall that is located close enough to primary roadways to make pedestrians feel secure, but large enough to provide an adequate buffer from traffic, space for the streetscape elements, and outdoor dining in appropriate locations. Critical to the success of the primary public space or town common is to establish it as unique; that is, it will not be identical to other centers that are developing in the metropolitan area. Green building and low impact development principles, including the program supported by the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) standards, shall be a priority in the design of buildings and sites. Individual buildings and development blocks should be designed with different massing and heights to provide a diverse cityscape in keeping with the Design Guidelines. Multiple architects and local residents and businesses are encouraged to provide input in the design of individual buildings and development blocks. Finally, the City Center shall be designed to be highly accessible by pedestrians, bicycles, and mass transit, by possibly creating a multi-modal transportation center.
- ***Public Open Space and Green Space.*** Public open spaces will be a significant feature of the City Center and will be designed to accommodate many different activities. In addition to an open area for festivals or Farmer’s Market type functions, the space shall also provide landscaped green spaces for aesthetics, rainwater absorption to aid in stormwater management, cooling, and recreation. Throughout the public open spaces, native trees of varying types and sizes shall be used to add beauty and environmental benefits and shall be supplemented by an understory of shrubs, groundcovers, perennials, and annuals.
- ***Well Designed Density.*** The key to a successful place is people, lots of people, at all times of the day. It is anticipated that multiple lots will be consolidated within the City Center area to create higher density, more urban mixed-use developments. However, it is important to recognize that the City shall not compromise its objectives regarding open space and design, with increased density and height. Increased densities may be allowed in exchange for specific amenities such as public plazas, pedestrian enhancements, significant cultural/heritage resource projects, and preferred commercial uses. The City will carefully calculate and evaluate density and height proposals so as to determine whether they conform or are in conflict with this objective.

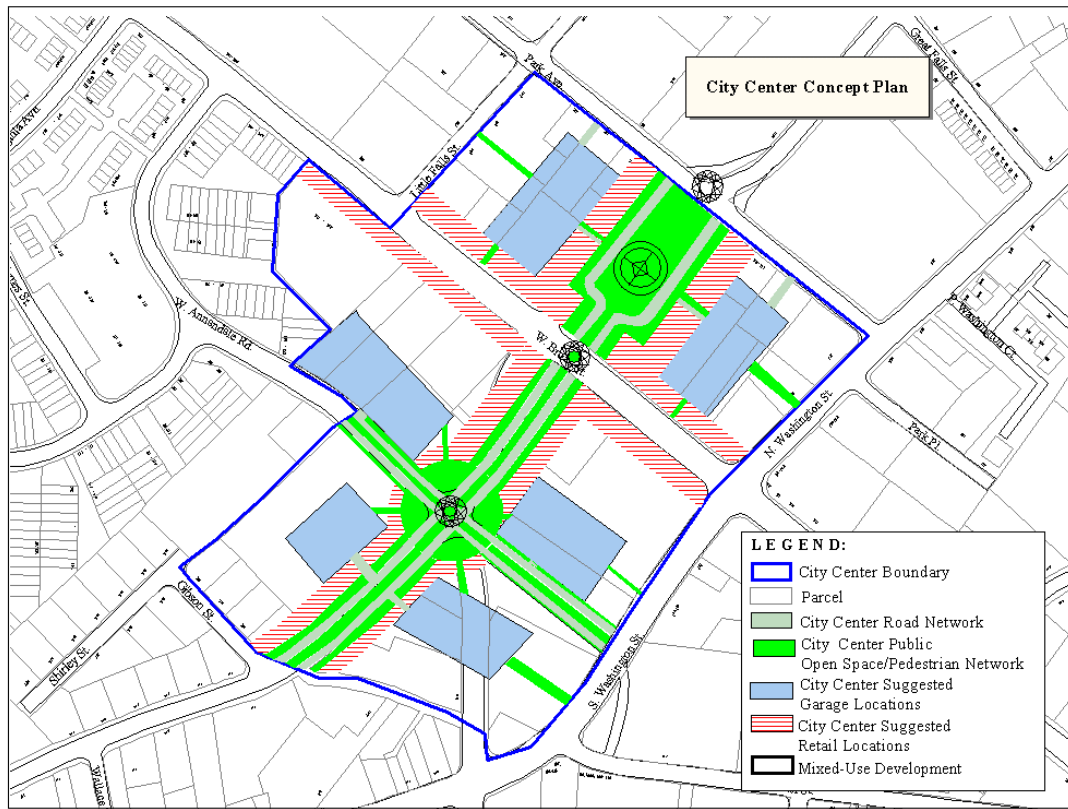
- ***Balanced, Sustainable Development.*** The City Center development will be sustainable for the near and long-term and create new revenue and economic development opportunities for the City. A mixture of retail, office, residential, and entertainment uses are necessary to create balance of goods and services, a strong customer base, and sustainable sources of municipal revenue. The City Center will not cause any unmitigated burden on City infrastructure.

***Affordable Housing.*** This is a highly valued principle and notwithstanding any negotiation on any other project, it is our expectation that the City Center project will meet the City's established goals and policies relative to affordable housing.

- ***Multi-Modal Accessibility.*** Access to City Center by foot, bicycle, car, bus, taxi, and metro should be convenient for City residents and visitors. A strong streetscape component must be created as well as strong pedestrian linkages within the City Center and from other City activity centers and neighborhoods to the Center. A multi-modal transit facility should be developed within or adjacent to City Center as a drop off and pick-up point for all bus, metro, taxicab, and airport shuttle vehicles, as well as parking for private single-occupancy vehicles and bicycles. Most parking that is not developed on-street in City Center should be located in above or below grade structures.
- ***City Stewardship.*** The City and its designees are the owners of a number of prime parcels of land within the City Center development area. The City has a fiduciary duty to protect the public's interest in transactions involving the land that it owns. The City may utilize various financing tools or special assessment mechanisms to support public infrastructure and improvements or to assist in the effective operation and maintenance of City Center.

### **Concept Plan:**

The Concept Plan is only a general guide to the locations for Public Open Space, Preferred Retail Locations, Parking facilities, and Transportation elements. This Concept Plan may be modified during the development process. The following is a brief description and graphic of each of these elements.



## Public Open Space

The public open space component on the north side of West Broad Street is very similar to what was displayed in the original Street-works concept for City Center; however, it is somewhat larger than what was shown in that plan and the open space in the area south of West Broad Street is smaller than was shown in the original plan and centered around a traffic circle. The design of buildings that fronts on these two public open spaces must be integrated with and complimentary to the spaces, and the design and uses must invite patrons to travel between the open spaces and the uses.

The larger public open space to the north of West Broad Street must be designed to accommodate many different activities. A semi-pervious hardscape component is necessary to allow for festivals and farmer's market activities, while beautifully landscaped areas are necessary for aesthetics, rainwater absorption, cooling, and recreation.

## Preferred Retail Location

This element of the concept plan displays the locations in which the City prefers to see retail-type facilities. These fall along the primary access ways of Maple Avenue and West Broad Street and could include shops, restaurants, galleries, and other recreational or entertainment uses. It is possible that within a large mixed-use development project

that short expanses of first floor road frontage could contain residential uses, but residential uses should not be the predominant component of the first floor of any block within City Center.

### **Transportation**

Convenient transportation within and to the City Center is critical. The City hopes to draw customers both from within and outside of the City, with local customers traveling primarily by non-vehicular forms of transport if possible and many outside customers traveling by bus, metro, and taxi. Within City Center the pedestrian and bicyclist should be given the highest priority with protected pathways to the buildings, on-street parking areas, and parking structures and ample bicycle parking facilities. A multi-modal transit station should be created within or adjacent to City Center, possibly as a central architectural feature, as a hub for all forms of transportation to the facility.



<b>13. Develop a City Center for Falls Church, near the intersection of Broad and Washington Streets to include shopping, offices, recreation, residential, and civic uses.</b>	<b>A. Implement the City's design guidelines and develop additional guidelines or regulations within the City Center to emphasize unique design, attractive storefronts and streetscape, public art, and ease of pedestrian and vehicular movement.</b>	For commercial areas to be vital and attractive to shoppers and employees, storefronts must be visually pleasing with appropriate landscaping and must be easily accessed by pedestrians and vehicles. For the City Center to compete with other regional centers, it must have a unique design and image. Public art can be one factor that contributes to this uniqueness. A downtown area must be very active both inside and at the street level to survive.	Base the City Center design guidelines on public input, the Comprehensive Plan, the best of the Street-works plan, best planning and best planning practices.  Work with prospective City Center developers on integrating Design Guideline features into the conceptual and final plans for the area.  Promote uniqueness of design and public art as a key desire to prospective developers.	Planning Division, Zoning Division, and City Manager
	<b>B. Incorporate public open space and green building practices in the City Center</b>	A primary gathering space or commons is critical to the success of City Center. Other smaller public spaces are also desirable. The City is also promoting the use of green building practices throughout the City, but will make it a focus of City Center.	Implement the Concept Plan as displayed within this chapter of the plan, including its depiction of the two primary public gathering places on North and South Maple Avenues.  Look to national and local green building practices to encourage the use of low impact development and internal green building techniques.	City Manager, Development Services Department, and Department of Environmental Services
	<b>C. Create a City Center that includes a balance of uses and a well-balanced density that can meet many</b>	All of these uses are important to make the City a vibrant and sustainable place. The City needs more residents and office workers to create a vibrant retail climate. It also needs more cultural and entertainment features to keep residents in the City during their free time and to provide activities for	Negotiate with prospective developers to obtain the correct balance of uses.	Planning Division and City Manager

	<p><i>of the residential, office retail, restaurant, cultural, and entertainment needs of residents, businesses, and employees and is market based in its approach. This area is planned to become the City's commercial center and residential uses should be included only at the level necessary to ensure maximum commercial activity.</i></p>	<p>young people.</p> <p>The density in City Center must be balanced with the surrounding area. Any plans must be realistic related current market conditions such that they will be successful.</p>	<p>Consider providing incentives to get some of the cultural and recreational uses.</p>	
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	<p><b><i>D. Develop a City Center multi-modal access plan to ensure safe vehicle, pedestrian, and bicycle transportation from all points of the City.</i></b></p> <p><b><i>[See link to Transportation Chapter]</i></b></p>	<p>It is critical that the City ensures safe and convenient access to City Center for residents, and preferably via non-automotive forms of transportation. This will free up parking for outside visitors and reduce congestion on our streets.</p>	<p>Assess access to the City Center area from neighborhoods and other commercial/civic areas. Roads, bike lanes (on and off-street), pathways, and sidewalks should be assessed for adequacy.</p>	<p>City Manager, Planning, and Public Works Division</p>
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